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HOSPITAL AND TRAINING SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

IN CHARGE OF

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THE STUDY OF ETHICS IN OUR SCHOOLS OF NURSING¹

In discussing the study of ethics, it seems wise to first define the term which, in its broadest sense, may be interpreted as "the ability to choose between right and wrong." There are all sorts of circumstances and conditions which control the motive for the act and it is an extremely difficult thing to lay down accurately the correct response for each situation which presents itself.

The code of ethics has been formulated and maintained by the character and individuality of the group in the broader social sense. Its origin began with the prehistoric people who were controlled solely by a brute force issuing from the individual possessing the stronger personality. Slowly it has developed into this code of social ethics which controls all civilized society of today.

The influences which have effected this growth may be first classified under the head of an ideal. From this beginning have evolved the religious ideal, the ideal in regard to self, and the ideal of democracy; these all being based upon the conception of a state which could best serve human development.

The ideal in regard to self applies itself most readily to ethics in the profession of nursing, as from it emerges the conception of a highly reflective life, its character and responsibility.

We might justly say that ethics is based upon the development of conscience, an established standard by which acts are judged. All individuals are responsible for the standards thus established, as their influence has acted more or less strongly upon the code of ideals.

In teaching nursing ethics we must first assume that the students have come into the nursing profession because they have an ideal and that they desire to give to humanity a service which is not in exchange for a mercenary compensation. No organization can flourish unless the individuals who compose it are loyal and steadfast to the code which it is striving to uphold, therefore we must get back of the etiquette of nursing which is being substituted for ethics in many of our schools of nursing today and teach the principle, as well as the application. The analysis of characteristics, such as personality, sympathy, patience, sincerity, loyalty, reliability, etc., must be carefully studied, and their particular application to the nursing profes-

¹Paper read at the annual meeting of the Canadian Nurses' Association, 1919.

sion made; giving emphasis to the necessity of inhibiting the undesirable, and developing the important characteristics which make for success, not only for the individual but for the profession as well.

This is the only way we are going to get a result that will carry out into the community and bear the fruits for which we are seeking. It is not sane to spend hours in teaching a lot of professional traditions of conduct to these alert minded young women unless we can make them realize why it is necessary to maintain the ideals which hold together the nursing profession, and inspire them with the desire to carry on after their diplomas have been granted them. The real result of the study of ethics shows itself at this time. If it has been real and alive, these women will reach out for better things and aspire to making ours the greatest profession on earth. This is not meant to convey the idea that the teaching of etiquette is unnecessary but simply that in itself it does not suffice. The motive must be developed which produces the real response, not one which is purely mechanical and superficial.

Unless we can develop permanently those instincts which tend to promote a better understanding of our obligations to society, it is more or less hopeless to scratch the surface; but with added education and an atmosphere which stimulates coöperation and emulation toward better things, we can develop in the student nurses something stronger than the temporary regard for certain rules and regulations placed around them during their hospital training.

Ethics must be lived every day, not taught in a course of eight hours. It is that intangible something which permeates the atmosphere and creeps into our individuality. Its expression is recognized in the life of the school body itself, and in the supervisors and graduates throughout the institution. It breathes of an ideal, an aspiration for better things and higher standards. To illustrate, the beds of the hospital should be well made, not because it is inspection day; the patients' nails should be cleaned, not because the principal always looks at them; morning lunches in the wards with internes should be omitted, not because of fear of interruption from the administration but because the motive for the action is changed. Nurses who are truly ethical, do a thing or refrain from doing it, because in their hearts they appreciate personal responsibility for their service in life.

We shall not get the right results in our schools of nursing until we come to realize that the big ideal which creates a joy in dignified useful service must be awakened and fostered. The whole scheme must be constructive, and our judgments must be made after viewing situations from all sides.